

NOTE ON BUNGWALL (*BLECHNUM SERRULATUM*,
RICH.), AN ABORIGINAL FOOD.

BY THOS. L. BANCROFT, M.B., EDIN.

(Communicated by J. H. Maiden, F.L.S., &c.)

Occasionally I have heard the aborigines speak of "Bungwall," a plant which in former times, and to within thirty years ago, served them as food; indeed, it and the nuts of the Bunya Bunya (*Araucaria Bidwilli*, Hook.) were the most important of their vegetable foods in Southern Queensland.

On Bribie Island in Moreton Bay it grew plentifully and to a large size. The chance of finding some of the stones used in the preparation of it induced me to take a couple of blacks and go there to investigate the subject. No account is given of *Blechnum serrulatum* having been used as a food by the blacks in the writings of A. Thozet,* Edward Palmer,† F. M. Bailey, J. H. Maiden or R. Brough Smyth. Mr. Bailey, however, knew that this fern served as food for the blacks, but had not mentioned the fact in his works on the Flora of the Colony.

Blechnum serrulatum is a freshwater swamp fern growing to the height of six feet; it has a wide distribution, not alone in Queensland but throughout the world. The whole root or rhizome is the part eaten; it is first dug out with a sharpened stick, dried in the sun for a short time, roasted and afterwards bruised, when it is ready to be eaten in conjunction with fish, crabs, and oysters.

The Bungwall stone is not unlike a stone tomahawk, the sharp edge being used to bruise the rhizome against a slab of bloodwood

* Pamphlet printed at the *Bulletin* office, Rockhampton, 1866: "Notes on the Vegetable Foods of the Aborigines of Northern Queensland."

† On Plants used by the Natives of North Queensland, Flinders and Mitchell Rivers, for Food, Medicine, &c., Royal Soc. N.S.W. Aug. 1883.

(*Eucalyptus corymbosa*, Sm.); wood being used in preference to stone to avoid grit, and likewise a stone in preference to a metal instrument to avoid chips.

There is no hard stone on Bribie, so the stones are imported there from the mainland. These are fragments of water-worn pieces of basalt, split by fire into the desired shape. We were fortunate in finding several Bungwall stones and also a Bunya Bunya stone; they were hidden at the butts of large Cypress Pines (*Callitris columellaris*, F.v.M.); in all probability their owners have long been dead.

Almost every native tribe has a distinct name for this plant; the majority of the blacks now in Brisbane call it "Tong-wun"; the word Bungwall is regarded by them as the white man's name, in the same way as are Boomerang for Barran, Kangaroo for Murree, &c.

The blacks are credited with having formerly made use of the roots of *Pteris aquilina*, Linn., for food, but those I have interrogated declare that their ancestors never ate it nor the root of any other fern but the Bungwall.

In a work by James Backhouse, published in 1843, entitled "A Narrative of a visit to the Australian Colonies," there is mention of the roots of *Lygodium microphyllum* (= *scandens*), *Pteris esculenta* (= *aquilina*, var. *esculenta*), and *Blechnum cartilagineum* having served the blacks as food.

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